

Forms of the Implicit Love of God

Since the commandment "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" is laid upon us so imperatively, it is to be inferred that the love in question is not only the love a soul can give or refuse when God comes in person to take the hand of his future bride, but also a love preceding this visit, for a permanent obligation is implied.

This previous love cannot have God for its object, since God is not present to the soul and has never yet been so. It must then have another object. Yet it is destined to become the love of God. We can call it the indirect or implicit love of God.

This holds good even when the object of such love bears the name of God, for we can then say either that the name is wrongly applied or that the use of it is permissible only on account of the development bound to follow later.

The implicit love of God can have only three immediate objects, the only three things here below in which God is really though secretly present. These are religious ceremonies, the beauty of the world, and our neighbor. Accordingly there are three loves.

To these three loves friendship should perhaps be added; strictly speaking it is distinct from the love of our neighbor.

These indirect loves have a virtue that is exactly and rigorously equivalent. It depends on circumstances, temperament, and vocation which is the first to enter the soul; one or other of them is dominant during the period of preparation. It is not necessarily the same one for the whole of this period.

It is probable that in most cases the period of preparation does not draw toward its end, the soul is not ready to receive the personal visit of its Master, unless it has in it all three indirect loves to a high degree.

The combination of these loves constitutes the love of God in the form best suited to the preparatory period, that is to say a veiled form.

They do not disappear when the love of God in the full sense of the word wells up in the soul; they become infinitely stronger and all loves taken together make only a single love.

The veiled form of love necessarily comes first however and often reigns alone in the soul for a very long time. Perhaps, with a great many people, it may continue to do so till death. Veiled love can reach a very high degree of purity and power.

At the moment when it touches the soul, each of the forms that such love may take has the virtue of a sacrament.

THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOR

Christ made this clear enough with regard to the love of our neighbor. He said that he would one day thank his benefactors, saying to them: "I was anhungered and ye gave me meat." Who but Christ himself can be Christ's benefactor? How can a man give meat to Christ, if he is not raised at least for a moment to the state spoken of by Saint Paul, when he no longer lives in himself but Christ lives in him?

The text of the Gospel is concerned only with Christ's presence in the sufferer. Yet it seems as though the spiritual worthiness of him who receives has nothing to do with the matter. It must then be admitted that it is the benefactor himself, as a bearer of Christ, who causes Christ to enter the famished sufferer with the bread he gives him. The other can consent to receive this presence or not, exactly like the person who goes to communion. If the gift is rightly given and rightly received, the passing of a morsel of bread from one man to another is something like a real communion.

Christ does not call his benefactors loving or charitable. He calls them just. The Gospel makes no distinction between the love of our neighbor and justice. In the eyes of the Greeks also a respect for Zeus the suppliant was the first duty of justice. We have invented the distinction between justice and charity. It is easy to understand why. Our notion of justice dispenses him who possesses from the obligation of giving. If he gives all the same, he thinks he has a right to be pleased with himself. He thinks he has done a good work. As for him who receives, it depends on the way he

interprets this notion whether he is exempted from all gratitude or whether it obliges him to offer servile thanks.

Only the absolute identification of justice and love makes the coexistence possible of compassion and gratitude on the one hand, and on the other, of respect for the dignity of affliction in the afflicted—a respect felt by the sufferer himself and the others.

It has to be recognized that no kindness can go further than justice without constituting a fault under a false appearance of kindness. But the just must be thanked for being just, because justice is so beautiful a thing, in the same way as we thank God because of his great glory. Any other gratitude is servile and even animal.

The only difference between the man who witnesses an act of justice and the man who receives a material advantage from it is that in such circumstances the beauty of justice is only a spectacle for the first, while for the second it is the object of a contact and even a kind of nourishment. Thus the feeling which is simple admiration in the first should be carried to a far higher degree in the second by the fire of gratitude.

To be ungrateful when we have been treated with justice, in circumstances where injustice is easily possible, is to deprive ourselves of the supernatural and sacramental virtue contained in every pure act of justice.

Nothing better enables us to form a conception of this virtue than the doctrine of natural justice as we find it set forth with an incomparable integrity of spirit in a few marvelous lines of Thucydides.

The Athenians, who were at war with Sparta, wanted to force the inhabitants of the little island of Melos, allied to Sparta from all antiquity and so far remaining neutral, to join with them. It was in vain that the men of Melos, faced with the ultimatum of the Athenians, invoked justice, imploring pity for the antiquity of their town. As they would not give in, the Athenians razed their city to the ground, put all their men to death, and sold all their women and children as slaves.

Thucydides has put the lines in question into the mouth of these Athenians. They begin by saying that they will not try to prove that their ultimatum is just.

"Let us treat rather of what is possible. . . . You know it as well as we do; the human spirit is so constituted that what is just is only examined if there is equal necessity on both sides. But if one is strong and the other weak, that which is possible is imposed by the first and accepted by the second."

The men of Melos said that in the case of a battle they would have the gods with them on account of the justice of their cause. The Athenians replied that they saw no reason to suppose so.

"As touching the gods we have the belief, and as touching men the certainty, that always, by a necessity of nature, each one commands wherever he has the power. We did not establish this law, we are not the first to apply it; we found it already established, we abide by it as something likely to endure forever; and that is why we apply it. We know quite well that you also, like all the others, once you reached the same degree of power, would act in the same way."

Such lucidity of mind in the conception of injustice is the

light that comes immediately below that of charity. It is the clarity that sometimes remains where charity once existed but has become extinguished. Below comes the darkness in which the strong sincerely believe that their cause is more just than that of the weak. That was the case with the Romans and the Hebrews.

Possibility and necessity are terms opposed to justice in these lines. Possible means all that the strong can impose upon the weak. It is reasonable to examine how far this possibility goes. Supposing it to be known, it is certain that the strong will accomplish his purpose to the extreme limit of possibility. It is a mechanical necessity. Otherwise it would be as though he willed and did not will simultaneously. There is a necessity for the strong as well as the weak in this.

When two human beings have to settle something and neither has the power to impose anything on the other, they have to come to an understanding. Then justice is consulted, for justice alone has the power to make two wills coincide. It is the image of that Love which in God unites the Father and Son, and which is the common thought of separate thinkers. But when there is a strong and a weak there is no need to unite their wills. There is only one will, that of the strong. The weak obeys. Everything happens just as it does when a man is handling matter. There are not two wills to be made to coincide. The man wills and the matter submits. The weak are like things. There is no difference between throwing a stone to get rid of a troublesome dog and saying to a slave: "Chase that dog away."

Beyond a certain degree of inequality in the relations of

men of unequal strength, the weaker passes into the state of matter and loses his personality. The men of old used to say: "A man loses half his soul the day he becomes a slave."

The even balance, an image of equal relations of strength, was the symbol of justice from all antiquity, specially in Egypt. It may have had a religious purpose before being used for commerce. Its use in trade is the image of the mutual consent, the very essence of justice, which should be the rule in exchanges. The definition of justice as being made up of mutual consent, which is found in the legislation of Sparta, probably originated in the Aegeo-Cretan civilization.

The supernatural virtue of justice consists of behaving exactly as though there were equality when one is the stronger in an unequal relationship. Exactly, in every respect, including the slightest details of accent and attitude, for a detail may be enough to place the weaker party in the condition of matter, which on this occasion naturally belongs to him, just as the slightest shock causes water that has remained liquid below freezing point to solidify.

Supernatural virtue, for the inferior thus treated, consists in not believing that there really is equality of strength and in recognizing that his treatment is due solely to the generosity of the other party. That is what is called gratitude. For the inferior treated in a different way, the supernatural virtue of justice consists in understanding that the treatment he is undergoing, though on the one hand differing from justice, on the other is in conformity with necessity and the mechanism of human nature. He should avoid both submission and revolt.

He who treats as equals those who are far below him in strength really makes them a gift of the quality of human beings, of which fate had deprived them. As far as it is possible for a creature, he reproduces the original generosity of the Creator with regard to them.

This is the most Christian of virtues. It is also the virtue that the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* describes in words as sublime even as those of the Gospel. "I have never caused anyone to weep. I have never spoken with a haughty voice. I have never made anyone afraid. I have never been deaf to words of justice and truth."

Gratitude on the part of the unfortunate, when it is pure, is but a participation in this same virtue, for only he who is capable of it can recognize it. Others experience the results of it without any recognition.

Such virtue is identical with real, active faith in the true God. The Athenians of Thucydides thought that divinity, like humanity in its natural state, always carried its power of commanding to the extreme limit of possibility.

The true God is the God we think of as almighty, but as not exercising his power everywhere, for he is found only in the heavens or in secret here below.

Those of the Athenians who massacred the inhabitants of Melos had no longer any idea of such a God.

The first proof that they were in the wrong lies in the fact that, contrary to their assertion, it happens, although extremely rarely, that a man will forbear out of pure generosity to command where he has the power to do so. That which is possible for man is possible also for God.

The examples of this may be challenged, but it is certain that if in one or another example it can be proved that the sole motive is pure generosity, such generosity will be generally admired. All that man is capable of admiring is possible with God.

The spectacle of this world is another, more certain proof. Pure goodness is not anywhere to be found in it. Either God is not almighty or he is not absolutely good, or else he does not command everywhere where he has the power to do so.

Thus the existence of evil here below, far from disproving the reality of God, is the very thing that reveals him in his truth.

On God's part creation is not an act of self-expansion but of restraint and renunciation. God and all his creatures are less than God alone. God accepted this diminution. He emptied a part of his being from himself. He had already emptied himself in this act of his divinity; that is why Saint John says that the Lamb had been slain from the beginning of the world. God permitted the existence of things distinct from himself and worth infinitely less than himself. By this creative act he denied himself, as Christ has told us to deny ourselves. God denied himself for our sakes in order to give us the possibility of denying ourselves for him. This response, this echo, which it is in our power to refuse, is the only possible justification for the folly of love of the creative act.

The religions which have a conception of this renunciation, this voluntary distance, this voluntary effacement of God, his apparent absence and his secret presence here be-

low, these religions are true religion, the translation into different languages of the great Revelation. The religions which represent divinity as commanding wherever it has the power to do so seem false. Even though they are monotheistic they are idolatrous.

He who, being reduced by affliction to the state of an inert and passive thing, returns, at least for a time, to the state of a human being, through the generosity of others; such a one, if he knows how to accept and feel the true essence of this generosity, receives at the very instant a soul begotten exclusively of charity. He is born from on high of water and of the Spirit. (The word in the Gospel, *anōthen*, means from on high more often than again.) To treat our neighbor who is in affliction with love is something like baptizing him.

He from whom the act of generosity proceeds can only behave as he does if his thought transports him into the other. At such a moment he also consists only of water and of the Spirit.

Generosity and compassion are inseparable, and both have their model in God, that is to say, in creation and in the Passion.

Christ taught us that the supernatural love of our neighbor is the exchange of compassion and gratitude which happens in a flash between two beings, one possessing and the other deprived of human personality. One of the two is only a little piece of flesh, naked, inert, and bleeding beside a ditch; he is nameless; no one knows anything about him. Those who pass by this thing scarcely notice it, and a few minutes afterward do not even know that they saw it. Only

one stops and turns his attention toward it. The actions that follow are just the automatic effect of this moment of attention. The attention is creative. But at the moment when it is engaged it is a renunciation. This is true, at least, if it is pure. The man accepts to be diminished by concentrating on an expenditure of energy, which will not extend his own power but will only give existence to a being other than himself, who will exist independently of him. Still more, to desire the existence of the other is to transport himself into him by sympathy, and, as a result, to have a share in the state of inert matter which is his.

Such an operation goes equally against the nature of a man who has not known affliction and is ignorant of its meaning, and a man who has known or had a foretaste of affliction and whom it fills with horror.

It is not surprising that a man who has bread should give a piece to someone who is starving. What is surprising is that he should be capable of doing so with so different a gesture from that with which we buy an object. Almsgiving when it is not supernatural is like a sort of purchase. It buys the sufferer.

Whatever a man may want, in cases of crime as in those of the highest virtue, in the minutest preoccupations as in the greatest designs, the essence of his desire always consists in this, that he wants above all things to be able to exercise his will freely. To wish for the existence of this free consent in another, deprived of it by affliction, is to transport oneself into him; it is to consent to affliction oneself, that is to say to the destruction of oneself. It is to deny oneself. In denying oneself, one becomes capable under God of estab-

lishing someone else by a creative affirmation. One gives oneself in ransom for the other. It is a redemptive act.

The sympathy of the weak for the strong is natural, for the weak in putting himself into the place of the other acquires an imaginary strength. The sympathy of the strong for the weak, being in the opposite direction, is against nature.

That is why the sympathy of the weak for the strong is pure only if its sole object is the sympathy received from the other, when the other is truly generous. This is supernatural gratitude, which means gladness to be the recipient of supernatural compassion. It leaves self-respect absolutely intact. The preservation of true self-respect in affliction is also something supernatural. Gratitude that is pure, like pure compassion, is essentially the acceptance of affliction. The afflicted man and his benefactor, between whom diversity of fortune places an infinite distance, are united in this acceptance. There is friendship between them in the sense of the Pythagoreans, miraculous harmony and equality.

Both of them recognize at the same time, with all their soul, that it is better not to command wherever one has power to do so. If this thought fills the whole soul and controls the imagination, which is the source of our actions, it constitutes true faith. For it places the Good outside this world, where are all the sources of power; it recognizes it as the archetype of the secret point that lies at the center of human personality and is the principle of renunciation.

Even in art and science, though second-class work, brilliant or mediocre, is an extension of the self; work of the very highest order, true creation, means self-loss. We do

not perceive this truth, because fame confuses and covers with its glory achievements of the highest order and the most brilliant productions of the second class, often giving the advantage to the latter.

Love for our neighbor, being made of creative attention, is analogous to genius.

Creative attention means really giving our attention to what does not exist. Humanity does not exist in the anonymous flesh lying inert by the roadside. The Samaritan who stops and looks gives his attention all the same to this absent humanity, and the actions which follow prove that it is a question of real attention.

"Faith," says Saint Paul, "is the evidence of things not seen." * In this moment of attention faith is present as much as love.

In the same way a man who is entirely at the disposal of others does not exist. A slave does not exist either in the eyes of his master or in his own. When the Negro slaves in America accidentally hurt their feet or their hands, they used to say: "It does not matter, it is the master's foot, the master's hand." He who has absolutely no belongings of any kind around which social consideration crystallizes does not exist. A popular Spanish song says in words of marvelous truth: "If anyone wants to make himself invisible, there is no surer way than to become poor." Love sees what is invisible.

God *thought* that which did not exist, and by this thought brought it into being. At each moment we exist only because God consents to think us into being, although really

* Hebrews 11:1.

we have no existence. At any rate that is how we represent creation to ourselves, humanly and hence inadequately of course, but this imagery contains an element of truth. God alone has this power, the power really to think into being that which does not exist. Only God, present in us, can really think the human quality into the victims of affliction, can really look at them with a look differing from that we give to things, can listen to their voice as we listen to spoken words. Then they become aware that they have a voice, otherwise they would not have occasion to notice it.

Difficult as it is really to listen to someone in affliction, it is just as difficult for him to know that compassion is listening to him.

The love of our neighbor is the love which comes down from God to man. It precedes that which rises from men to God. God is longing to come down to those in affliction. As soon as a soul is disposed to consent, though it were the last, the most miserable, the most deformed of souls, God will precipitate himself into it in order, through it, to look at and listen to the afflicted. Only as time passes does the soul become aware that he is there. But, though it finds no name for him, wherever the afflicted are loved for themselves alone, it is God who is present.

God is not present, even if we invoke him, where the afflicted are merely regarded as an occasion for doing good. They may even be loved on this account, but then they are in their natural role, the role of matter and of things. We have to bring to them in their inert, anonymous condition a personal love.

That is why expressions such as to love our neighbor in God, or for God, are misleading and equivocal. A man has all he can do, even if he concentrates all the attention of which he is capable, to look at this small inert thing of flesh, lying stripped of clothing by the roadside. It is not the time to turn his thoughts toward God. Just as there are times when we must think of God and forget all creatures without exception, there are times when, as we look at creatures, we do not have to think explicitly of God. At such times, the presence of God in us has as its condition a secret so deep that it is even a secret from us. There are times when thinking of God separates us from him. Modesty is the condition of nuptial union.

In true love it is not we who love the afflicted in God; it is God in us who loves them. When we are in affliction, it is God in us who loves those who wish us well. Compassion and gratitude come down from God, and when they are exchanged in a glance, God is present at the point where the eyes of those who give and those who receive meet. The sufferer and the other love each other, starting from God, through God, but not for the love of God; they love each other for the love of the one for the other. This is an impossibility. That is why it comes about only through the agency of God.

He who gives bread to the famished sufferer for the love of God will not be thanked by Christ. He has already had his reward in this thought itself. Christ thanks those who do not know to whom they are giving food.

Moreover, giving is only one of the two possible forms love for the afflicted may take. Power always means power

to do good or to hurt. In a relationship where the strength is very unequally divided, the superior can be just toward the inferior either in doing him good with justice or in hurting him with justice. In the first case we have almsgiving; in the second, punishment.

Just punishment, like just almsgiving, enshrines the real presence of God and constitutes something in the nature of a sacrament. That also is made quite clear in the Gospel. It is expressed by the words: "He that is without sin among you let him first cast a stone." Christ alone is without sin.

Christ spared the woman taken in adultery. The administration of punishment was not in accordance with the earthly life which was to end on the Cross. He did not however prescribe the abolition of penal justice. He allowed stoning to continue. Wherever it is done with justice, it is therefore he who throws the first stone. As he dwells in the famished wretch whom a just man feeds, so he dwells in the condemned wretch whom a just man punishes. He did not say so, but he showed it clearly enough by dying like a common criminal. He is the divine model of prisoners and old offenders. As the young workingmen of the J.O.C.* thrill at the thought that Christ is one of them, so condemned criminals have just reason to taste a like rapture. They only need to be told, as the working men were told. In a sense Christ is nearer to them than to the martyrs.

The stone which slays and the piece of bread which provides nourishment have exactly the same virtue if Christ is present at the start and the finish. The gift of life and the gift of death are equivalent.

* *Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique*, cf. note on *Jécistes*.

According to the Hindu tradition, King Rama, the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity, was obliged, much to his regret, to avoid scandal among his people by executing a man of low caste who had broken the law through giving himself up to the ascetic practice of religion. The King went himself to find the man and slew him with a stroke of his sword. Immediately afterward the soul of the dead man appeared to him and fell at his feet, thanking him for the degree of glory conferred upon him by the contact of this blessed sword. Thus the execution, although quite unjust in one sense, but legal and carried out by the very hand of God, had had in it all the virtue of a sacrament.

The legal character of a punishment has no true significance if it does not give it some kind of religious meaning, if it does not make of it the analogy of a sacrament; and therefore all penal offices, from that of the judge to that of the executioner and the prison guard, should in some sort share in the priestly office.

Justice in punishment can be defined in the same way as justice in almsgiving. It means giving our attention to the victim of affliction as to a being and not a thing; it means wishing to preserve in him the faculty of free consent.

Men think they are despising crime when they are really despising the weakness of affliction. A being in whom the two are combined affords them an opportunity of giving free play to their contempt for affliction on the pretext that they are scorning crime. He is thus the object of the greatest contempt. Contempt is the contrary of attention. There are exceptions only where there is a crime which for some reason has prestige, as is often the case with murder on ac-

count of the fleeting moment of power which it implies, or where the crime does not make a very vivid impression upon those who assess its culpability. Stealing is the crime most devoid of prestige, and it causes most indignation because property is the thing to which people are most generally and powerfully attached. That is apparent even in the penal code.

No state is beneath that of a human being enveloped in a cloud of guilt, be it true or false, and entirely in the power of a few men who are to decide his fate with a word. These men do not pay any attention to him. Moreover, from the moment when anyone falls into the hands of the law with all its penal machinery until the moment he is free again—and those known as hardened criminals are like prostitutes, in that they hardly ever do get free until the day of their death—such a one is never an object of attention. Everything combines, down to the smallest details, down even to the inflections of people's voices, to make him seem vile and outcast in all men's eyes including his own. The brutality and flippancy, the terms of scorn and the jokes, the way of speaking, the way of listening and of not listening, all these things are equally effective.

There is no intentional unkindness in it all. It is the automatic effect of a professional life which has as its object crime seen in the form of affliction, that is to say in the form where horror and defilement are exposed in their nakedness. Such a contact, being uninterrupted, necessarily contaminates, and the form this contamination takes is contempt. It is this contempt which is reflected on every prisoner at the bar. The penal apparatus is like a transmitter which turns

the whole volume of defilement contained in all the circles where the miserable crime is to be found upon each accused person. The mere contact with this penal apparatus causes a kind of horror in that part of the soul remaining intact, and the horror is in exact proportion to the innocence. Those who are completely rotten receive no injury and do not suffer.

It cannot be otherwise, if there is not something between the penal apparatus and the crime capable of cleansing defilement. This can only be God. Infinite purity alone is not contaminated by contact with evil. All finite purity becomes defilement itself through prolonged contact. However the code may be reformed, punishment cannot be humane unless it passes through Christ.

The severity of the sentence is not the most important thing. Under present conditions, a condemned man, although guilty and given a punishment which is relatively light in view of his offense, can more often than not be rightly considered as having been the victim of a cruel injustice. What is important is that the punishment should be legitimate, that is to say that it should proceed directly from the law. It is important that the law should be recognized as having a divine character, not because of its content but because it is law. It is important that the whole organization of penal justice should be directed toward obtaining from the magistrates and their assistants the attention and respect for the accused that is due from every man to any person who may be in his power and from the accused his consent to the punishment inflicted, a consent of which the innocent Christ has given us the perfect model.

A death sentence for a slight offense, pronounced in such a way, would be less horrible than a sentence of six months in prison given as it is at the present day. Nothing is more frightful than the spectacle, now so frequent, of an accused, whose situation provides him with nothing to fall back upon but his own words, and who is incapable of arranging these words because of his social origin and lack of culture, as he stands broken down by guilt, affliction, and fear, stammering before judges who are not listening and who interrupt him in tones of ostentatious refinement.

For as long as affliction is to be found in society, for as long as legal or private almsgiving and punishment are inevitable, the separation between civil institutions and religious life will be a crime. The lay conception considered alone is completely false. It only has some excuse as a reaction against a totalitarian religion. In that respect, it must be admitted, it is partly justifiable.

In order to be present everywhere, as it should, religion must not only not be totalitarian, but it must limit itself strictly to the plane of supernatural love which alone is suitable for it. If it did so it would penetrate everywhere. The Bible says: "Wisdom penetrates everywhere on account of its perfect purity."

Through the absence of Christ, mendicity, in the widest sense of the word, and penal action are perhaps the most frightful things on earth—two things that are almost infernal. They have the very color of hell. Prostitution might be added to them, for it is to real marriage what almsgiving and punishment without charity are to almsgiving and punishment which are just.

Men have received the power to do good or harm not only to the body but to the souls of their fellows, to the whole soul of those in whom God is not present and to all that part of the soul uninhabited by God of the others. A man may be indwelt by God, by the power of evil or merely by the mechanism of the flesh. When he gives or punishes, what he bears within him enters the soul of the other through the bread or the sword. The substance of the bread and the sword are virgin, empty of good and of evil, equally capable of conveying one or the other. He who is forced by affliction to receive bread or to suffer chastisement has his soul exposed naked and defenseless both to evil and to good.

There is only one way of never receiving anything but good. It is to know, with our whole soul and not just abstractly, that men who are not animated by pure charity are merely wheels in the mechanism of the order of the world, like inert matter. After that we see that everything comes directly from God, either through the love of a man, or through the lifelessness of matter, whether it be tangible or psychic; through spirit or water. All that increases the vital energy in us is like the bread for which Christ thanks the just. All the blows, the wounds, and the mutilations are like a stone thrown at us by the hand of Christ. Bread and stone both come from Christ and penetrating to our inward being bring Christ into us. Bread and stone are love. We must eat the bread and lay ourselves open to the stone, so that it may sink as deeply as possible into our flesh. If we have any armor able to protect our soul from the stones thrown by Christ, we should take it off and cast it away.

LOVE OF THE ORDER OF THE WORLD

The love of the order and beauty of the world is thus the complement of the love of our neighbor.

It proceeds from the same renunciation, the renunciation that is an image of the creative renunciation of God. God causes this universe to exist, but he consents not to command it, although he has the power to do so. Instead he leaves two other forces to rule in his place. On the one hand there is the blind necessity attaching to matter, including the psychic matter of the soul, and on the other the autonomy essential to thinking persons.

By loving our neighbor we imitate the divine love which created us and all our fellows. By loving the order of the world we imitate the divine love which created this universe of which we are a part.

Man does not have to renounce the command of matter and of souls, since he does not possess the power to command them. But God has conferred upon him an imaginary likeness of this power, an imaginary divinity, so that he also, although a creature, may empty himself of his divinity.

Just as God, being outside the universe, is at the same time the center, so each man imagines he is situated in the center of the world. The illusion of perspective places him at the center of space; an illusion of the same kind falsifies his idea of time; and yet another kindred illusion arranges a whole hierarchy of values around him. This illusion is extended even to our sense of existence, on account of the intimate connection between our sense of value and our

sense of being; being seems to us less and less concentrated the farther it is removed from us.

We relegate the spatial form of this illusion to the place where it belongs, the realm of the imagination. We are obliged to do so; otherwise we should not perceive a single object; we should not even be able to direct ourselves enough to take a single step consciously. God thus provides us with a model of the operation which should transform all our soul. In the same way as in our infancy we learn to control and check this illusion in our sense of space, we should control and check it in our sense of time, values, and being. Otherwise from every point of view except that of space we shall be incapable of discerning a single object or directing a single step.

We live in a world of unreality and dreams. To give up our imaginary position as the center, to renounce it, not only intellectually but in the imaginative part of our soul, that means to awaken to what is real and eternal, to see the true light and hear the true silence. A transformation then takes place at the very roots of our sensibility, in our immediate reception of sense impressions and psychological impressions. It is a transformation analogous to that which takes place in the dusk of evening on a road, where we suddenly discern as a tree what we had at first seen as a stooping man; or where we suddenly recognize as a rustling of leaves what we thought at first was whispering voices. We see the same colors; we hear the same sounds, but not in the same way.

To empty ourselves of our false divinity, to deny ourselves, to give up being the center of the world in imagina-

tion, to discern that all points in the world are equally centers and that the true center is outside the world, this is to consent to the rule of mechanical necessity in matter and of free choice at the center of each soul. Such consent is love. The face of this love, which is turned toward thinking persons, is the love of our neighbor; the face turned toward matter is love of the order of the world, or love of the beauty of the world which is the same thing.

In ancient times the love of the beauty of the world had a very important place in men's thoughts and surrounded the whole of life with marvelous poetry. This was the case in every nation—in China, in India, and in Greece. The Stoicism of the Greeks, which was very wonderful and to which primitive Christianity was infinitely close, especially in the writings of Saint John, was almost exclusively the love of the beauty of the world. As for Israel, certain parts of the Old Testament, the Psalms, the Book of Job, Isaiah, and the Book of Wisdom, contain an incomparable expression of the beauty of the world.

The example of Saint Francis shows how great a place the beauty of the world can have in Christian thought. Not only is his actual poem perfect poetry, but all his life was perfect poetry in action. His very choice of places for solitary retreats or for the foundations of his convents was in itself the most beautiful poetry in action. Vagabondage and poverty were poetry with him; he stripped himself naked in order to have immediate contact with the beauty of the world.

Saint John of the Cross also has some beautiful lines about the beauty of the world. But in general, making suitable

reservations for the treasures that are unknown, little known, or perhaps buried among the forgotten remains of the Middle Ages, we might say that the beauty of the world is almost absent from the Christian tradition. This is strange. It is difficult to understand. It leaves a terrible gap. How can Christianity call itself catholic if the universe itself is left out?

It is true that there is little mention of the beauty of the world in the Gospel. But in so short a text, which, as Saint John says, is very far from containing all that Christ taught, the disciples no doubt thought it unnecessary to put anything so generally accepted.

It does, however, come up on two occasions. Once Christ tells us to contemplate and imitate the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, in their indifference as to the future and their docile acceptance of destiny; and another time he invites us to contemplate and imitate the indiscriminate distribution of rain and sunlight.

The Renaissance thought to renew its spiritual links with antiquity by passing over Christianity, but it hardly took anything but the secondary products of ancient civilization—art, science, and curiosity regarding human things. It scarcely touched the fringe of the central inspiration. It failed to rediscover any link with the beauty of the world.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries there had been the beginning of a Renaissance which would have been the real one if it had been able to bear fruit; it began to germinate notably in Languedoc. Some of the Troubadour poems on spring lead one to think that perhaps Christian inspiration and the beauty of the world would not have been separated

had it developed. Moreover the spirit of Languedoc left its mark on Italy and was perhaps not unrelated to the Franciscan inspiration. But, whether it be coincidence or more probably the connection of cause and effect, these germs did not survive the war of the Albigenses and only traces of the movement were found after that.

Today one might think that the white races had almost lost all feeling for the beauty of the world, and that they had taken upon them the task of making it disappear from all the continents where they have penetrated with their armies, their trade and their religion. As Christ said to the Pharisees: "Woe to you, for ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves and them that were entering in ye hindered." *

And yet at the present time, in the countries of the white races, the beauty of the world is almost the only way by which we can allow God to penetrate us, for we are still farther removed from the other two. Real love and respect for religious practices are rare even among those who are most assiduous in observing them, and are practically never to be found in others. Most people do not even conceive them to be possible. As regards the supernatural purpose of affliction, compassion and gratitude are not only rare but have become almost unintelligible for almost everyone to-day. The very idea of them has almost disappeared; the very meaning of the words has been debased.

On the other hand a sense of beauty, although mutilated, distorted, and soiled, remains rooted in the heart of man as a powerful incentive. It is present in all the preoccupations

* Luke 11:52.

of secular life. If it were made true and pure, it would sweep all secular life in a body to the feet of God; it would make the total incarnation of the faith possible.

Moreover, speaking generally, the beauty of the world is the commonest, easiest, and most natural way of approach.

Just as God hastens into every soul immediately it opens, even a little, in order through it to love and serve the afflicted, so he descends in all haste to love and admire the tangible beauty of his own creation through the soul that opens to him.

But the contrary is still more true. The soul's natural inclination to love beauty is the trap God most frequently uses in order to win it and open it to the breath from on high.

This was the trap which enticed Cora. All the heavens above were smiling at the scent of the narcissus; so was the entire earth and all the swelling ocean. Hardly had the poor girl stretched out her hand before she was caught in the trap. She fell into the hands of the living God. When she escaped she had eaten the seed of the pomegranate which bound her for ever. She was no longer a virgin; she was the spouse of God.

The beauty of the world is the mouth of a labyrinth. The unwary individual who on entering takes a few steps is soon unable to find the opening. Worn out, with nothing to eat or drink, in the dark, separated from his dear ones, and from everything he loves and is accustomed to, he walks on without knowing anything or hoping anything, incapable even of discovering whether he is really going forward or merely turning round on the same spot. But this affliction is as

nothing compared with the danger threatening him. For if he does not lose courage, if he goes on walking, it is absolutely certain that he will finally arrive at the center of the labyrinth. And there God is waiting to eat him. Later he will go out again, but he will be changed, he will have become different, after being eaten and digested by God. Afterward he will stay near the entrance so that he can gently push all those who come near into the opening.

The beauty of the world is not an attribute of matter in itself. It is a relationship of the world to our sensibility, the sensibility that depends upon the structure of our body and our soul. The *Micromegas* of Voltaire, a thinking infusorian organism, could have had no access to the beauty on which we live in the universe. We must have faith that, supposing such creatures were to exist, the world would be beautiful for them too; but it would be beautiful in another way. Anyhow we must have faith that the universe is beautiful on all levels, and more generally that it has a fullness of beauty in relation to the bodily and psychic structure of each of the thinking beings that actually do exist and of all those that are possible. It is this very agreement of an infinity of perfect beauties that gives a transcendent character to the beauty of the world. Nevertheless the part of this beauty we experience is designed and destined for our human sensibility.

The beauty of the world is the co-operation of divine wisdom in creation. "Zeus made all things," says an Orphic line, "and Bacchus perfected them." This perfecting is the creation of beauty; God created the universe, and his Son, our first-born brother, created the beauty of it for us. The

beauty of the world is Christ's tender smile for us coming through matter. He is really present in the universal beauty. The love of this beauty proceeds from God dwelling in our souls and goes out to God present in the universe. It also is like a sacrament.

This is true only of universal beauty. With the exception of God, nothing short of the universe as a whole can with complete accuracy be called beautiful. All that is in the universe and is less than the universe can be called beautiful only if we extend the word beyond its strict limits and apply it to things that share indirectly in beauty, things that are imitations of it.

All these secondary kinds of beauty are of infinite value as openings to universal beauty. But, if we stop short at them, they are, on the contrary, veils; then they corrupt. They all have in them more or less of this temptation, but in very different degrees.

There are also a number of seductive factors which have nothing whatever to do with beauty but which cause the things in which they are present to be called beautiful through lack of discernment; for these things attract love by fraud, and all men, even the most ignorant, even the vilest of them, know that beauty alone has a right to our love. The most truly great know it too. No man is below or above beauty. The words which express beauty come to the lips of all as soon as they want to praise what they love. Only some are more and some less able to discern it.

Beauty is the only finality here below. As Kant said very aptly, it is a finality which involves no objective. A beautiful thing involves no good except itself, in its totality, as it

appears to us. We are drawn toward it without knowing what to ask of it. It offers us its own existence. We do not desire anything else, we possess it, and yet we still desire something. We do not in the least know what it is. We want to get behind beauty, but it is only a surface. It is like a mirror that sends us back our own desire for goodness. It is a sphinx, an enigma, a mystery which is painfully tantalizing. We should like to feed upon it but it is merely something to look at; it appears only from a certain distance. The great trouble in human life is that looking and eating are two different operations. Only beyond the sky, in the country inhabited by God, are they one and the same operation. Children feel this trouble already, when they look at a cake for a long time almost regretting that it should have to be eaten and yet are unable to help eating it. It may be that vice, depravity, and crime are nearly always, or even perhaps always, in their essence, attempts to eat beauty, to eat what we should only look at. Eve began it. If she caused humanity to be lost by eating the fruit, the opposite attitude, looking at the fruit without eating it, should be what is required to save it. "Two winged companions," says an Upanishad, "two birds are on the branch of a tree. One eats the fruit, the other looks at it." These two birds are the two parts of our soul.

It is because beauty has no end in view that it constitutes the only finality here below. For here below there are no ends. All the things that we take for ends are means. That is an obvious truth. Money is the means of buying, power is the means of commanding. It is more or less the same for all the things that we call good.

Only beauty is not the means to anything else. It alone is good in itself, but without our finding any particular good or advantage in it. It seems itself to be a promise and not a good. But it only gives itself; it never gives anything else.

Nevertheless, as it is the only finality, it is present in all human pursuits. Although they are all concerned with means, for everything that exists here below is only a means, beauty sheds a luster upon them which colors them with finality. Otherwise there could neither be desire, nor, in consequence, energy in the pursuit.

For a miser after the style of Harpagon, all the beauty of the world is enshrined in gold. And it is true that gold, as a pure and shining substance, has something beautiful about it. The disappearance of gold from our currency seems to have made this form of avarice disappear too. Today those who heap up money without spending it are desirous of power.

Most of those who seek riches connect the thought of luxury with them. Luxury is the finality of riches. Moreover luxury itself represents beauty for a whole class of men. It provides surroundings through which they can feel in a vague fashion that the universe is beautiful; just as Saint Francis needed to be a vagabond and a beggar in order to feel it to be beautiful. Either way would be equally legitimate if in each case the beauty of the world were experienced in an equally direct, pure, and full manner; but happily God willed that it should not be so. Poverty has a privilege. That is a dispensation of Providence without which the love of the beauty of the world might easily come into conflict with the love of our neighbor. Never-

theless, the horror of poverty—and every reduction of wealth can be felt as poverty, even its failure to increase—is essentially a horror of ugliness. The soul that is prevented by circumstances from feeling anything of the beauty of the world, even confusedly, even through what is false, is invaded to its very center by a kind of horror.

The love of power amounts to a desire to establish order among the men and things around oneself, either on a large or small scale, and this desire for order is the result of a sense of beauty. In this case, as in the case of luxury, the question is one of forcing a certain circle into a pattern suggestive of universal beauty; this circle is limited, but the hope of increasing it indefinitely may often be present. This unsatisfied appetite, the desire to keep on increasing, is due precisely to a desire for contact with universal beauty, even though the circle we are organizing is not the universe. It is not the universe and it hides it. Our immediate universe is like the scenery in a theater.

In his poem *Sémiramis*, Valéry succeeds very well in making us feel the connection between tyranny and the love of beauty. Apart from war, the instrument for increasing his power, Louis XIV was only interested in festivals and architecture. Moreover war itself, especially as conducted in the old days, stirs man's sense of beauty in a way that is vital and poignant.

Art is an attempt to transport into a limited quantity of matter, modeled by man, an image of the infinite beauty of the entire universe. If the attempt succeeds, this portion of matter should not hide the universe, but on the contrary it should reveal its reality to all around.

Works of art that are neither pure and true reflections of the beauty of the world nor openings onto this beauty are not strictly speaking beautiful; their authors may be very talented but they lack real genius. That is true of a great many works of art which are among the most celebrated and the most highly praised. Every true artist has had real, direct, and immediate contact with the beauty of the world, contact that is of the nature of a sacrament. God has inspired every first-rate work of art, though its subject may be utterly and entirely secular; he has not inspired any of the others. Indeed the luster of beauty that distinguishes some of those others may quite well be a diabolical luster.

Science has as its object the study and the theoretical reconstruction of the order of the world—the order of the world in relation to the mental, psychic, and bodily structure of man. Contrary to the naïve illusions of certain scholars, neither the use of telescopes and microscopes, nor the employment of most unusual algebraical formulae, nor even a contempt for the principle of noncontradiction will allow it to get beyond the limits of this structure. Moreover it is not desirable that it should. The object of science is the presence of Wisdom in the universe, Wisdom of which we are the brothers, the presence of Christ, expressed through matter which constitutes the world.

We reconstruct for ourselves the order of the world in an image, starting from limited, countable, and strictly defined data. We work out a system for ourselves, establishing connections and conceiving of relationships between terms that are abstract and for that reason possible for us to deal with. Thus in an image, an image of which the very exist-

ence hangs upon an act of our attention, we can contemplate the necessity which is the substance of the universe but which, as such, only manifests itself to us by the blows it deals.

We cannot contemplate without a certain love. The contemplation of this image of the order of the world constitutes a certain contact with the beauty of the world. The beauty of the world is the order of the world that is loved.

Physical work is a specific contact with the beauty of the world, and can even be, in its best moments, a contact so full that no equivalent can be found elsewhere. The artist, the scholar, the philosopher, the contemplative should really admire the world and pierce through the film of unreality that veils it and makes of it, for nearly all men at nearly every moment of their lives, a dream or stage set. They ought to do this but more often than not they cannot manage it. He who is aching in every limb, worn out by the effort of a day of work, that is to say a day when he has been subject to matter, bears the reality of the universe in his flesh like a thorn. The difficulty for him is to look and to love. If he succeeds, he loves the Real.

That is the immense privilege God has reserved for his poor. But they scarcely ever know it. No one tells them. Excessive fatigue, harassing money worries, and the lack of true culture prevent them from noticing it. A slight change in these conditions would be enough to open the door to a treasure. It is heart-rending to see how easy it would be in many cases for men to procure a treasure for their fellows and how they allow centuries to pass without taking the trouble to do so.

At the time when there was a people's civilization, of which we are today collecting the crumbs as museum pieces under the name of folklore, the people doubtless had access to the treasure. Mythology too, which is very closely related to folklore, testifies to it, if we can decipher the poetry it contains.

Carnal love in all its forms, from the highest, that is to say true marriage or platonic love, down to the worst, down to debauchery, has the beauty of the world as its object. The love we feel for the splendor of the heavens, the plains, the sea, and the mountains, for the silence of nature which is borne in upon us by thousands of tiny sounds, for the breath of the winds or the warmth of the sun, this love of which every human being has at least an inkling, is an incomplete, painful love, because it is felt for things incapable of responding, that is to say for matter. Men want to turn this same love toward a being who is like themselves and capable of answering to their love, of saying yes, of surrendering. When the feeling for beauty happens to be associated with the sight of some human being, the transference of love is made possible, at any rate in an illusory manner. But it is all the beauty of the world, it is universal beauty, for which we yearn.

This kind of transference is what all love literature expresses, from the most ancient and well-worn metaphors and comparisons to the subtle analyses of Proust.

The longing to love the beauty of the world in a human being is essentially the longing for the Incarnation. It is mistaken if it thinks it is anything else. The Incarnation alone can satisfy it. It is therefore wrong to reproach the

mystics, as has been done sometimes, because they use love's language. It is theirs by right. Others only borrow it.

If carnal Love on all levels goes more or less directly toward beauty—and the exceptions are perhaps only apparent—it is because beauty in a human being enables the imagination to see in him something like an equivalent of the order of the world.

That is why sins in this realm are serious. They constitute an offense against God from the very fact that the soul is unconsciously engaged in searching for God. Moreover they all come back to one thing and that is the more or less complete determination to dispense with consent. To be completely determined to dispense with it is perhaps the most frightful of all crimes. What can be more horrible than not to respect the consent of a being in whom one is seeking, though unconsciously, for an equivalent of God?

It is still a crime, though a less serious one, to be content with consent issuing from a low or superficial region of the soul. Whether there is physical union or not, the exchange of love is unlawful if, on both sides, the consent does not come from that central point in the soul where the yes can be nothing less than eternal. The obligation of marriage which is so often regarded as a simple social convention today, is implanted in the nature of human thought through the affinity between carnal love and beauty. Everything that is related to beauty should be unaffected by the passage of time. Beauty is eternity here below.

It is not surprising that in temptation men so often have the feeling of something absolute, which infinitely surpasses them, which they cannot resist. The absolute is indeed

there. But we are mistaken when we think that it dwells in pleasure.

The mistake is the effect of this imaginary transference which is the principal mechanism of human thought. Job speaks of the slave who in death will cease to hear the voice of his master and who thinks that this voice harms him. It is but too true. The voice does him only too much harm. Yet he is mistaken. The voice is not harmful in itself. If he were not a slave it would not hurt him at all. But because he is a slave, the pain and the brutality of the blows of the whip enter his soul by the sense of hearing, at the same time as the voice, and penetrate to its very depths. There is no barrier by which he can protect himself. Affliction has forged this link.

In the same way the man who thinks he is in the power of pleasure is really in the power of the absolute which he has transferred to it. This absolute is to pleasure what the blows of the whip are to the master's voice; but the association is not the result of affliction here; it is the result of an original crime, the crime of idolatry. Saint Paul has emphasized the kinship between vice and idolatry.

He who has located the absolute in pleasure cannot help being dominated by it. Man does not struggle against the absolute. He who knows how to locate the absolute outside pleasure possesses the perfection of temperance.

The different kinds of vice, the use of drugs, in the literal or metaphorical sense of the word, all such things constitute the search for a state where the beauty of the world will be tangible. The mistake lies precisely in the search for a special state. False mysticism is another form of this error.

If the error is thrust deeply enough into the soul, man cannot but succumb to it.

In general all the tastes of men from the guiltiest to the most innocent, from the most usual to the most peculiar, are related to a combination of circumstances or to a set of people or surroundings which they imagine can give them access to the beauty of the world. The advantage of this or that group of circumstances is due to temperament, to the memories of a past life, to causes which are usually impossible to recognize.

There is only one case, which moreover is frequent, when the attraction of the pleasure of the senses does not lie in the contact it offers with beauty; it is when, on the contrary, it provides an escape from it.

The soul seeks nothing so much as contact with the beauty of the world, or at a still higher level, with God; but at the same time it flies from it. When the soul flies from anything it is always trying to get away, either from the horror of ugliness, or contact with what is truly pure. This is because all mediocrity flies from the light; and in all souls, except those which are near perfection, there is a great part which is mediocre. This part is seized with panic every time that a little pure beauty or pure goodness appears; it hides behind the flesh, it uses it as a veil. As a bellicose nation really needs to cover its aggression with some pretext or other if it is to succeed in its enterprises, the quality of the pretext being actually quite indifferent, so the mediocre part of the soul needs a slight pretext for flying from the light. The attraction of pleasure and the fear of pain supply this pretext. There again it is the absolute that dominates the

soul, but as an object of repulsion and no longer as an attraction. Very often also in the search for carnal pleasure the two movements are combined; the movement of running toward pure beauty and the movement of flying far from it are indistinguishably tangled.

However it may be, in every kind of human occupation there is always some regard for the beauty of the world seen in more or less distorted or soiled images. As a consequence there is not any department of human life which is purely natural. The supernatural is secretly present throughout. Under a thousand different forms, grace and mortal sin are everywhere.

Between God and these incomplete, unconscious, often criminal searching for beauty, the only link is the beauty of the world. Christianity will not be incarnated so long as there is not joined to it the Stoic's idea of filial piety for the city of the world, for the country of here below which is the universe. When, as the result of some misapprehension, very difficult to understand today, Christianity cut itself off from Stoicism, it condemned itself to an abstract and separate existence.

Even the very highest achievements of the search for beauty, in art or science for instance, are not truly beautiful. The only true beauty, the only beauty that is the real presence of God, is the beauty of the universe. Nothing less than the universe is beautiful.

The universe is beautiful as a beautiful work of art would be if there could be one that deserved this name. Thus it contains nothing constituting an end or a good in itself. It has in it no finality beyond universal beauty itself. The

essential truth to be known concerning this universe is that it is absolutely devoid of finality. Nothing in the way of finality can be ascribed to it except through a lie or a mistake.

If we ask why such and such a word in a poem is in such and such a place and if there is an answer, either the poem is not of the highest order or else the reader has understood nothing of it. If one can rightly say that the word is where it is in order to express a particular idea, or for the sake of a grammatical connection, or for the sake of the rhyme or alliteration, or to complete the line, or to give a certain color, or even for a combination of several reasons of this kind, there has been a seeking for effect in the composition of the poem, there has not been true inspiration. In the case of a really beautiful poem the only answer is that the word is there because it is suitable that it should be. The proof of this suitability is that it is there and that the poem is beautiful. The poem is beautiful, that is to say the reader does not wish it other than it is.

It is in this way that art imitates the beauty of the world. The suitability of things, beings, and events consists only in this, that they exist and that we should not wish that they did not exist or that they had been different. Such a wish would be an impiety toward our universal country, a lack of the love of the Stoics. We are so constituted that this love is in fact possible; and it is this possibility of which the name is the beauty of the world.

The question of Beaumarchais: "Why these things rather than others?" never has any answer, because the world is devoid of finality. The absence of finality is the reign of

necessity. Things have causes and not ends. Those who think to discern special designs of Providence are like professors who give themselves up to what they call the explanation of the text, at the expense of a beautiful poem.

In art, the equivalent of this reign of necessity is the resistance of matter and arbitrary rules. Rhyme imposes upon the poet a direction in his choice of words which is absolutely unrelated to the sequence of ideas. Its function in poetry is perhaps analogous to that of affliction in our lives. Affliction forces us to feel with all our souls the absence of finality.

If the soul is set in the direction of love, the more we contemplate necessity, the more closely we press its metallic cold and hardness directly to our very flesh, the nearer we approach to the beauty of the world. That is what Job experienced. It was because he was so honest in his suffering, because he would not entertain any thought that might impair its truth, that God came down to reveal the beauty of the world to him.

It is because absence of any finality or intention is the essence of the beauty of the world that Christ told us to behold the rain and the light of the sun, as they fall without discrimination upon the just and the unjust. This recalls the supreme cry of Prometheus: "The heavens, where the common orb of day revolves for all." Christ commands us to imitate this beauty. Plato also in the *Timæus* counsels us through contemplation to make ourselves like to the beauty of the world, like to the harmony of the circular movements that cause day and night, months, seasons, and years to succeed each other and return. In these revolutions also, and in

their combination, the absence of intention and finality is manifest; pure beauty shines forth.

It is because it can be loved by us, it is because it is beautiful, that the universe is a country. It is our only country here below. This thought is the essence of the wisdom of the Stoics. We have a heavenly country, but in a sense it is too difficult to love, because we do not know it; above all, in a sense, it is too easy to love, because we can imagine it as we please. We run the risk of loving a fiction under this name. If the love of the fiction is strong enough it makes all virtue easy, but at the same time of little value. Let us love the country of here below. It is real; it offers resistance to love. It is this country that God has given us to love. He has willed that it should be difficult yet possible to love it.

We feel ourselves to be outsiders, uprooted, in exile here below. We are like Ulysses who had been carried away during his sleep by sailors and woke in a strange land, longing for Ithaca with a longing that rent his soul. Suddenly Athena opened his eyes and he saw that he was in Ithaca. In the same way every man who longs indefatigably for his country, who is distracted from his desire neither by Calypso nor by the Sirens, will one day suddenly find that he is there.

The imitation of the beauty of the world, that which corresponds to the absence of finality, intention, and discrimination in it, is the absence of intention in ourselves, that is to say the renunciation of our own will. To be perfectly obedient is to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.

Among men, a slave does not become like his master by

obeying him. On the contrary, the more he obeys the greater is the distance between them.

It is otherwise between man and God. If a reasonable creature is absolutely obedient, he becomes a perfect image of the Almighty as far as this is possible for him.

We are made in the very image of God. It is by virtue of something in us which attaches to the fact of being a person but which is not the fact itself. It is the power of renouncing our own personality. It is obedience.

Every time that a man rises to a degree of excellence, which by participation makes of him a divine being, we are aware of something impersonal and anonymous about him. His voice is enveloped in silence. This is evident in all the great works of art or thoughts, in the great deeds of saints and in their words.

It is then true in a sense that we must conceive of God as impersonal, in the sense that he is the divine model of a person who passes beyond the self by renunciation. To conceive of him as an all-powerful person, or under the name of Christ as a human person, is to exclude oneself from the true love of God. That is why we have to adore the perfection of the heavenly Father in his even diffusion of the light of the sun. The divine and absolute model of that renunciation which is obedience in us—such is the creative and ruling principle of the universe—such is the fullness of being.

It is because the renunciation of the personality makes man a reflection of God that it is so frightful to reduce men to the condition of inert matter by plunging them into affliction. When the quality of human personality is taken from them, the possibility of renouncing it is also taken away,

except in the case of those who are sufficiently prepared. As God has created our independence so that we should have the possibility of renouncing it out of love, we should for the same reason wish to preserve the independence of our fellows. He who is perfectly obedient sets an infinite price upon the faculty of free choice in all men.

In the same way there is no contradiction between the love of the beauty of the world and compassion. Such love does not prevent us from suffering on our own account when we are in affliction. Neither does it prevent us from suffering because others are afflicted. It is on another plane from suffering.

The love of the beauty of the world, while it is universal, involves, as a love secondary and subordinate to itself, the love of all the truly precious things that bad fortune can destroy. The truly precious things are those forming ladders reaching toward the beauty of the world, openings onto it. He who has gone farther, to the very beauty of the world itself, does not love them any less but much more deeply than before.

Numbered among them are the pure and authentic achievements of art and science. In a much more general way they include everything that envelops human life with poetry through the various social strata. Every human being has at his roots here below a certain terrestrial poetry, a reflection of the heavenly glory, the link, of which he is more or less vaguely conscious, with his universal country. Affliction is the tearing up of these roots.

Human cities in particular, each one more or less according to its degree of perfection, surround the life of their

inhabitants with poetry. They are images and reflections of the city of the world. Actually, the more they have the form of a nation, the more they claim to be countries themselves, the more distorted and soiled they are as images. But to destroy cities, either materially or morally, or to exclude human beings from a city, thrusting them down to the state of social outcasts, this is to sever every bond of poetry and love between human beings and the universe. It is to plunge them forcibly into the horror of ugliness. There can scarcely be a greater crime. We all have a share by our complicity in an almost innumerable quantity of such crimes. If only we could understand, it should wring tears of blood from us.

THE LOVE OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

The love of institutional religion, although the name of God necessarily comes into it, is not in itself an explicit, but an implicit love of God, for it does not involve direct, immediate contact with him. God is present in religious practices, when they are pure, just as he is present in our neighbor and in the beauty of the world; in the same way and not any more.

The form that the love of religion takes in the soul differs a great deal according to the circumstances of our lives. Some circumstances prevent the very birth of this love; others kill it before it has been able to grow very strong. In affliction some men, in spite of themselves, develop a hatred and contempt for religion because the cruelty, pride, or corruption of certain of its ministers have made them suffer.

There are others who have been reared from their earliest youth in surroundings impregnated with a spirit of this sort. We must conclude that in such cases, by God's mercy, the love of our neighbor and the love of the beauty of the world, if they are sufficiently strong and pure, will be enough to raise the soul to any height.

The love of institutional religion normally has as its object the prevailing religion of the country or circle in which a man is brought up. As the result of an inborn habit, everyone thinks first of that each time he thinks of a religious service.

The whole virtue of religious practices can be conceived of from the Buddhist tradition concerning the recitation of the name of the Lord. It is said that Buddha made a vow to raise to himself, in the Land of Purity, all those who pronounced his name with the desire of being saved by him; and that because of this vow the recitation of the name of the Lord really has the power of transforming the soul.

Religion is nothing else but this promise of God. Every religious practice, every rite, all liturgy is a form of the recitation of the name of the Lord and in principle should have a real virtue, the virtue of saving whoever devotes himself to performing it with desire.

All religions pronounce the name of God in their particular language. As a rule it is better for a man to name God in his native tongue rather than in one that is foreign to him. Except in special cases the soul is not able to abandon itself utterly when it has to make the slight effort of seeking for the words in a foreign language, even when this language is well known.

A writer whose native language is poor, difficult to manipulate, and not widely known throughout the world is very strongly tempted to adopt another. There are a few like Conrad who have done so with startling success. But they are very rare. Except in special cases such a change does harm, both thought and style suffer, the writer is always ill at ease in the adopted language and cannot rise above mediocrity.

A change of religion is for the soul like a change of language for a writer. All religions, it is true, are not equally suitable for the recitation of the name of the Lord. Some, without any doubt, are very imperfect mediums. The religion of Israel, for instance, must have been imperfect when it made the crucifixion of Christ possible. The Roman religion can scarcely be said to deserve the name of religion at all.

But in general the relative value of the various religions is a very difficult thing to discern; it is almost impossible, perhaps quite impossible. For a religion is known only from inside. Catholics say this of Catholicism, but it is true of all religions. Religion is a form of nourishment. It is difficult to appreciate the flavor and food value of something one has never eaten.

The comparison of religions is only possible, in some measure, through the miraculous virtue of sympathy. We can know men to a certain extent if at the same time as we observe them from outside we manage by sympathy to transport our own soul into theirs for a time. In the same way the study of different religions does not lead to a real knowledge of them unless we transport ourselves for a time

by faith to the very center of whichever one we are studying. Here, moreover, this word faith is used in its strongest sense.

This scarcely ever happens, for some have no faith, and the others have faith exclusively in one religion and only bestow upon the others the sort of attention we give to strangely shaped shells. There are others again who think they are capable of impartiality because they have only a vague religiosity which they can turn indifferently in any direction, whereas, on the contrary, we must have given all our attention, all our faith, all our love to a particular religion in order to think of any other religion with the high degree of attention, faith, and love that is proper to it. In the same way, only those who are capable of friendship can take a real heartfelt interest in the fate of an utter stranger.

In all departments of life, love is not real unless it is directed toward a particular object; it becomes universal without ceasing to be real only as a result of analogy and transference.

It might be said in passing that the knowledge of what analogy and transference are, a knowledge for which mathematics, the various branches of science, and philosophy are a preparation, also has a direct relationship to love.

In Europe today, and perhaps even in the whole world, the knowledge of comparative religion amounts to just about nothing. People have not even a notion of the possibility of such a knowledge. Even without the prejudices which get in our way, it is already very difficult for us even to form an idea of it. Among the different forms of religion

there are, as it were, partial compensations for the visible differences, certain hidden equivalents which can only be caught sight of by the most penetrating discernment. Each religion is an original combination of explicit and implicit truths; what is explicit in one is implicit in another. The implicit adherence to a truth can in some cases be worth as much as the explicit adherence, sometimes even a great deal more. He who knows the secrets of all hearts alone knows the secret of the different forms of faith. He has never revealed this secret, whatever anyone may say.

If one is born into a religion which is not too unsuitable for pronouncing the name of the Lord, if one loves this native religion with a well directed and pure love, it is difficult to imagine a legitimate motive for giving it up, before direct contact with God has placed the soul under the guidance of the divine will itself. After that the change is only legitimate if it is made in obedience. History shows that in fact this happens but rarely. Most often, perhaps always, the soul that has reached the highest realms of spirituality is confirmed in its love of the tradition that served it as a ladder.

If the imperfection of the religion in which one is born is too great, or if the form under which it appears in one's native surroundings is too corrupt, or if, through special circumstances, love for this religion has never been born or has been killed, the adoption of a foreign religion is legitimate. It is legitimate and necessary for certain people; probably not for everybody. This is the same with regard to those who have been brought up without the practice of any religion.

In all other cases, to change one's religion is a very serious decision, and it is much more serious to influence another person to change. It is yet more, infinitely more serious to exercise official pressure of such a nature in a conquered country.

On the other hand, in spite of all the varieties of religion existing in Europe and America, one might say that in principle, directly or indirectly, closely or only from afar, the Catholic religion forms the native spiritual background of all men belonging to the white races.

The virtue of religious practices is due to a contact with what is perfectly pure, resulting in the destruction of evil. Nothing here below is perfectly pure except the total beauty of the universe, and that we are unable to feel directly until we are very far advanced in the way of perfection. Moreover, this total beauty cannot be contained in anything tangible, though it is itself tangible in a certain sense.

Religious things are special tangible things, existing here below and yet perfectly pure. This is not on account of their own particular character. The church may be ugly, the singing out of tune, the priest corrupt, and the faithful inattentive. In a sense that is of no importance. It is as with a geometrician who draws a figure to illustrate a proof. If the lines are not straight and the circles are not round it is of no importance. Religious things are pure by right, theoretically, hypothetically, by convention. Therefore their purity is unconditioned. No stain can sully it. That is why it is perfect. It is not, however, perfect in the same way as Roland's mare, which, while it had all possible virtues, had

also the drawback of not existing. Human conventions are useless if they are not connected with motives that impel people to observe them. In themselves they are simple abstractions; they are unreal and have no effect. But the convention by which religious things are pure is ratified by God himself. Thus it is an effective convention, a convention containing virtue and operating of itself. This purity is unconditioned and perfect, and at the same time real.

There we have a truth that is a fact and in consequence cannot be demonstrated by argument. It can only be verified experimentally.

It is a fact that the purity of religious things is almost everywhere to be seen in the form of beauty, when faith and love do not fail. Thus the words of the liturgy are marvelously beautiful; and the words of the prayer issued for us from the very lips of Christ is perfect above all. In the same way Romanesque architecture and Gregorian plain chant are marvelously beautiful.

At the very center, however, there is something utterly stripped of beauty, where there is no outward evidence of purity, something depending wholly on convention. It cannot be otherwise. Architecture, singing, language, even if the words are chosen by Christ himself, all those things are in a sense distinct from absolute purity. Absolute purity, present here below to our earthly senses, as a particular thing, such can only be a convention, which is a convention and nothing else. This convention, placed at the central point, is the Eucharist.

The virtue of the dogma of the real presence lies in its very absurdity. Except for the infinitely touching symbol-

ism of food, there is nothing in a morsel of bread that can be associated with our thought of God. Thus the conventional character of the divine presence is evident. Christ can be present in such an object only by convention. For this very reason he can be perfectly present in it. God can only be present in secret here below. His presence in the Eucharist is truly secret since no part of our thought can reach the secret. Thus it is total.

No one dreams of being surprised that reasoning worked out from nonexistent perfect lines and perfect circles should be effectively applied to engineering. Yet that is incomprehensible. The reality of the divine presence in the Eucharist is more marvelous but not more incomprehensible.

One might in a sense say by analogy that Christ is present in the consecrated host by hypothesis, in the same way that a geometrician says by hypothesis that there are two equal angles in a certain triangle.

It is because it has to do with a convention that only the form of the consecration matters, not the spiritual state of him who consecrates.

If it were something other than a convention, it would be at least partially human and not totally divine. A real convention is a supernatural harmony, taking the word harmony in the Pythagorean sense.

Only a convention can be the perfection of purity here below, for all nonconventional purity is more or less imperfect. That a convention should be real, that is a miracle of divine mercy.

The Buddhist conception of the recitation of the name of the Lord contains the same truth, for a name is a convention

too. Yet our habit of thought which confuses things with their names makes us forget this very easily. The Eucharist is conventional to a higher degree.

Even the presence of Christ in human flesh was something other than perfect purity, since he censured the man who called him good, and since he said: "It is expedient for you that I go away." * He must then be more completely present in a morsel of consecrated bread. His presence is more complete inasmuch as it is more secret.

Yet this presence was probably still more complete, and also still more secret, in his body of flesh at the moment when the police seized this body as that of a common criminal. But as a result he was forsaken by all. He was too present. Men could not endure it.

The convention of the Eucharist, or something of the kind, is indispensable for man; the presence of perfect purity is indispensable for him. For man can only fix his full attention on something tangible, and he needs sometimes to fix his attention upon perfect purity. Only this act can make it possible for him, by a process of transference, to destroy a part of the evil that is in him. That is why the Host is really the Lamb of God which takes away sin.

We are all conscious of evil within ourselves; we all have a horror of it and want to get rid of it. Outside ourselves we see evil under two distinct forms, suffering and sin. But in our feelings about our own nature the distinction no longer appears, except abstractly or through reflection. We feel in ourselves something which is neither suffering nor sin, which is the two of them at once, the root common to both,

* John 16:7.

defilement and pain at the same time. This is the presence of evil in us. It is the ugliness in us. The more we feel it, the more it fills us with horror. The soul rejects it in the same way as we vomit. By a process of transference we pass it on to the things that surround us. These things, however, thus becoming blemished and ugly in our eyes, send us back the evil that we had put into them. They send it back after adding to it. In this exchange the evil in us increases. It seems to us then that the very places where we are living and the things that surround us imprison us in evil, and that it becomes daily worse. This is a terrible anguish. When the soul, worn out with this anguish, ceases to feel it any more, there is little hope of its salvation.

It is thus that an invalid conceives hatred and disgust for his room and surroundings, a prisoner for his cell, and only too often a worker for his factory.

It is useless to provide people in this state with beautiful things, for there is nothing which does not eventually become spoiled and sullied by this process of transference, until it ends up as an object of horror.

Perfect purity alone cannot be defiled. If at the moment when the soul is invaded by evil the attention can be turned toward a thing of perfect purity, so that a part of the evil is transferred to it, this thing will be in no way tarnished by it, nor will it send it back. Thus each minute of such attention really destroys a part of the evil.

What the Hebrews tried to accomplish, by means of a kind of magic, in their rite of the scapegoat, can only be carried out here on earth by perfect purity. The true scapegoat is the Lamb.

The day when a perfect being was to be found here below in human form, the greatest possible amount of evil scattered around him was automatically concentrated upon him in the form of suffering. At that time, throughout the Roman Empire, the greatest misfortune and the greatest crime among men was slavery. That is why he suffered the death which was the extremity of affliction possible for a slave. In a mysterious manner this transference constitutes the Redemption.

It is the same when a human being turns his eyes and his attention toward the Lamb of God present in the consecrated bread, a part of the evil which he bears within him is directed toward perfect purity, and there suffers destruction.

It is a transmutation rather than a destruction. The contact with perfect purity dissociates the suffering and sin which had been mixed together so indissolubly. The part of evil in the soul is burned by the fire of this contact and becomes only suffering, and the suffering is impregnated with love.

In the same way when all the evil diffused throughout the Roman Empire was concentrated on Christ it became only suffering to him.

If there were not perfect and infinite purity here below, if there were only finite purity, which contact with evil eventually exhausts, we could never be saved.

Penal justice affords a frightful illustration of this truth. In principle it is something pure which has goodness for its object. It is, however, an imperfect, finite, human purity. Therefore, uninterrupted contact with a mixture of crime

and affliction wears away this purity and puts in its place a defilement about equal to the totality of crime, a defilement far exceeding that of any particular criminal.

Men fail to drink from the source of purity. Creation would however be an act of cruelty if this spring did not well up wherever there is crime and affliction. If there had been no crime and affliction in the centuries further back than two thousand years, and in the countries untouched by missions, we might think that the Church had the monopoly of Christ and the sacraments. How can we bear the thought of a single crucified slave twenty-two centuries ago, how can we help accusing God, if we think that at that time Christ was absent and every kind of sacrament unknown? It is true that we hardly think at all about slaves crucified twenty-two centuries ago.

When we have learned to look at perfect purity, the shortness of human life is the only thing to prevent us from being sure that unless we play false we can attain perfection even here on earth. For we are finite beings and the evil that is within us is finite too. The purity that is offered to our eyes is infinite. However little evil we were to destroy at each look, we could be certain, if our time were unlimited that by looking often enough, one day we should destroy it all. We should then have reached the end of evil as the *Bhagavad-Gita* expresses so magnificently. We should have destroyed evil for the Lord of Truth and we should bring him truth, as the Egyptian Book of the Dead says.

One of the principal truths of Christianity, a truth that goes almost unrecognized today, is that looking is what saves us. The bronze serpent was lifted up so that those who

lay maimed in the depths of degradation should be saved by looking upon it.

It is at those moments when we are, as we say, in a bad mood, when we feel incapable of the elevation of soul that befits holy things, it is then that it is most effectual to turn our eyes toward perfect purity. For it is then that evil, or rather mediocrity, comes to the surface of the soul and is in the best position for being burned by contact with the fire.

It is however then that the act of looking is almost impossible. All the mediocre part of the soul, fearing death with a more violent fear than that caused by the approach of the death of the body, revolts and suggests lies to protect itself.

The effort not to listen to these lies, although we cannot prevent ourselves from believing them, the effort to look upon purity at such times, has to be something very violent; yet it is absolutely different from all that is generally known as effort, such as doing violence to one's feelings or an act of will. Other words are needed to express it, but language cannot provide them.

The effort that brings a soul to salvation is like the effort of looking or of listening; it is the kind of effort by which a fiancée accepts her lover. It is an act of attention and consent; whereas what language designates as will is something suggestive of muscular effort.

The will is on the level of the natural part of the soul. The right use of the will is a condition of salvation, necessary no doubt but remote, inferior, very subordinate and purely negative. The weeds are pulled up by the muscular effort of the peasant, but only sun and water can make the corn grow. The will cannot produce any good in the soul.

Efforts of the will are only in their right place for carrying out definite obligations. Wherever there is no strict obligation we must follow either our natural inclination or our vocation, that is to say God's command. Actions prompted by our inclination clearly do not involve an effort of will. In our acts of obedience to God we are passive; whatever difficulties we have to surmount, however great our activity may appear to be, there is nothing analogous to muscular effort; there is only waiting, attention, silence, immobility, constant through suffering and joy. The crucifixion of Christ is the model of all acts of obedience.

This kind of passive activity, the highest of all, is perfectly described in the *Bhagavad-Gita* and in Lao-Tse. Also there is a supernatural union of opposites, harmony in the Pythagorean sense.

That we have to strive after goodness with an effort of our will is one of the lies invented by the mediocre part of ourselves in its fear of being destroyed. Such an effort does not threaten it in any way, it does not even disturb its comfort—not even when it entails a great deal of fatigue and suffering. For the mediocre part of ourselves is not afraid of fatigue and suffering; it is afraid of being killed.

There are people who try to raise their souls like a man continually taking standing jumps in the hopes that, if he jumps higher every day, a time may come when he will no longer fall back but will go right up to the sky. Thus occupied he cannot look at the sky. We cannot take a single step toward heaven. It is not in our power to travel in a vertical direction. If however we look heavenward for a long time, God comes and takes us up. He raises us easily.

As Aeschylus says: "There is no effort in what is divine." There is an easiness in salvation which is more difficult to us than all our efforts.

In one of Grimm's stories there is a competition between a giant and a little tailor to see which is the stronger. The giant throws a stone so high that it takes a very long time before it comes down again. The little tailor lets a bird fly and it does not come down at all. Anything without wings always comes down again in the end.

It is because the will has no power to bring about salvation that the idea of secular morality is an absurdity. What is called morality only depends on the will in what is, so to speak, its most muscular aspect. Religion on the contrary corresponds to desire, and it is desire that saves.

The Roman caricature of Stoicism also appeals to the muscular will. But true Stoicism, the Stoicism of the Greeks, from which Saint John, or perhaps Christ, borrowed the terms "*Logos*" and "*pneuma*," is purely desire, piety, and love. It is full of humility.

The Christianity of today has let itself become contaminated by its adversaries, on this point as on many others. The metaphor of a search for God is suggestive of efforts of muscular will. It is true that Pascal contributed to the spread of this metaphor. He made several mistakes, notably that of confusing faith and autosuggestion to a certain extent.

In the great symbols of mythology and folklore, in the parables of the Gospel, it is God who seeks man. "*Quaerens me sedisti lassus.*" Nowhere in the Gospel is there question of a search undertaken by man. Man does not take a step

unless he receives some pressure or is definitely called. The role of the future wife is to wait. The slave waits and watches while his master is at a festival. The passer-by does not invite himself to the marriage feast, he does not ask for an invitation; he is brought in almost by surprise; his part is only to put on the appropriate garment. The man who has found a pearl in a field sells all his goods to buy the field; he does not need to dig up the whole field with a spade in order to unearth the pearl; it is enough for him to sell all he possesses. To long for God and to renounce all the rest, that alone can save us.

The attitude that brings about salvation is not like any form of activity. The Greek word which expresses it is *ὑπομενή*, and *patientia* is rather an inadequate translation of it. It is the waiting or attentive and faithful immobility that lasts indefinitely and cannot be shaken. The slave, who waits near the door so as to open immediately the master knocks, is the best image of it. He must be ready to die of hunger and exhaustion rather than change his attitude. It must be possible for his companions to call him, talk to him, hit him, without his even turning his head. Even if he is told that the master is dead, and even if he believes it, he will not move. If he is told that the master is angry with him and will beat him when he returns, and if he believes it, he will not move.

Active searching is prejudicial, not only to love, but also to the intelligence, whose laws are the same as those of love. We just have to wait for the solution of a geometrical problem or the meaning of a Latin or Greek sentence to come into our mind. Still more must we wait for any new scien-

tific truth or for a beautiful line of poetry. Seeking leads us astray. This is the case with every form of what is truly good. Man should do nothing but wait for the good and keep evil away. He should make no muscular effort except in order not to be shaken by evil. In the constant turning and returning of which our human condition is made up, true virtue in every domain is negative, at least in appearance. This waiting for goodness and truth is, however, something more intense than any searching.

The notion of grace, as opposed to virtue depending on the will, and that of inspiration, as opposed to intellectual or artistic work, these two notions, if they are well understood, show the efficacy of desire and of waiting.

Attention animated by desire is the whole foundation of religious practices. That is why no system of morality can take their place. The mediocre part of the soul has, however, a great many lies in its arsenal that are capable of protecting it, even during prayer or the participation of the sacraments. It puts veils between our eyes and the presence of perfect purity, and it is clever enough to call them God—such veils, for instance, as states of the soul, sources of sensible joy, of hope, of comfort, of soothing consolation, or else a combination of habits, or one or several human beings, or perhaps a social circle.

It is difficult to avoid the pitfall of striving to imagine the divine perfection religion invites us to love. Never in any case can we imagine something more perfect than ourselves. This effort renders useless the marvel of the Eucharist.

A certain formation of the intelligence is necessary in order to be able to contemplate in the Eucharist only what

by definition it enshrines, that is to say, something which is totally outside our experience, something of which we only know, as Plato says, that it exists and that nothing else can ever be desired except in error.

The trap of traps, the almost inevitable trap, is the social one. Everywhere, always, in everything, the social feeling produces a perfect imitation of faith, that is to say perfectly deceptive. This imitation has the great advantage of satisfying every part of the soul. That which longs for goodness believes it is fed. That which is mediocre is not hurt by the light; it is quite at its ease. Thus everyone is in agreement. The soul is at peace. But Christ said that he did not come to bring peace. He brought a sword, the sword that severs in two, as Aeschylus says.

It is almost impossible to distinguish faith from its social imitation. All the more so because the soul can contain one part of true faith and one of imitation faith. It is almost but not quite impossible.

Under present circumstances, it is perhaps a question of life or death for faith that the social imitation should be repudiated.

The necessity for a perfectly pure presence to take away defilement is not restricted to churches. People come with their stains to the churches, and that is all very well. It would, however, be more in conformity with the spirit of Christianity if, besides that, Christ went to bring his presence into those places most polluted with shame, misery, crime, and affliction, into prisons and law courts, into work-houses and shelters for the wretched and the outcast. Every session of bench or courts should begin and end with a

prayer, in which the magistrates, the police, the accused, and the public shared. Christ should not be absent from the places where work or study is going on. All human beings, whatever they are doing and wherever they are, should be able to have their eyes fixed, during the whole of each day, upon the serpent of bronze.

It should also be publicly and officially recognized that religion is nothing else but a looking. In so far as it claims to be anything else, it is inevitable that it should either be shut up inside churches, or that it should stifle everything in every other place where it is found. Religion should not claim to occupy a place in society other than that which rightly belongs to supernatural love in the soul. Moreover it is true also that many people degrade charity in themselves because they want to make it occupy too large and too visible a place in their soul. Our Father lives only in secret. Love should always be accompanied by modesty. True faith implies great discretion, even with regard to itself. It is a secret between God and us in which we ourselves have scarcely any part.

The love of our neighbor, the love of the beauty of the world, and the love of religion are in a sense quite impersonal loves. This could easily not be so in the last case, because religion is connected with a certain section of society. The very nature of religious practices must remedy this. At the center of the Catholic religion a little formless matter is found, a little piece of bread. The love directed toward this particle of matter is necessarily impersonal. It is not the human person of Christ such as we picture him; it is not the divine person of the Father, likewise subject to

all the errors of our imagination; it is outwardly only a fragment of matter, yet it is at the center of the Catholic religion. Herein lies the great scandal and yet the most wonderful virtue of this religion. In all authentic forms of religious life alike, there is something that guarantees their impersonal character. The love of God ought to be impersonal as long as there has not been any direct and personal contact; otherwise it is an imaginary love. Afterward it ought to be both personal and impersonal again, but this time in a higher sense.

FRIENDSHIP

There is however a personal and human love which is pure and which enshrines an intimation and a reflection of divine love. This is friendship, provided we keep strictly to the true meaning of the word.

Preference for some human being is necessarily a different thing from charity. Charity does not discriminate. If it is found more abundantly in any special quarter, it is because affliction has chanced to provide an occasion there for the exchange of compassion and gratitude. It is equally available for the whole human race, inasmuch as affliction can come to all, offering them an opportunity for such an exchange.

Preference for a human being can be of two kinds. Either we are seeking some particular good in him, or we need him. In a general way all possible attachments come under one of these heads. We are drawn toward a thing, either because there is some good we are seeking from it, or because we

cannot do without it. Sometimes the two motives coincide. Often however they do not. Each is distinct and quite independent. We eat distasteful food, if we have nothing else, because we cannot do otherwise. A moderately greedy man looks out for delicacies, but he can easily do without them. If we have no air we are suffocated; we struggle to get it, not because we expect to get some advantage from it but because we need it. We go in search of sea air without being driven by any necessity, because we like it. In time it often comes about automatically that the second motive takes the place of the first. This is one of the great misfortunes of our race. A man smokes opium in order to attain to a special condition, which he thinks superior; often, as time goes on, the opium reduces him to a miserable condition which he feels to be degrading, but he is no longer able to do without it. Arnolphe bought Agnes* from her adopted mother, because it seemed to him it would be an advantage to have a little girl with him, a little girl whom he would gradually make into a good wife. Later on she ceased to cause him anything but a heart-rending and degrading torment. But with the passage of time his attachment to her had become a vital bond which forced this terrible line from his lips:

"Mais je sens là-dedans qu'il faudra que je crève—"†

Harpagon started by considering gold as an advantage. Later it became nothing but the object of a haunting obsession, yet an object of which the loss would cause his death. As Plato says, there is a great difference between the essence of the Necessary and that of the Good.

* Characters in Molière's *L'Ecole des Femmes*. Harpagon, below, is a character in Molière's *L'Avare*.

† But I feel in all this that I shall be torn asunder.

There is no contradiction between seeking our own good in a human being and wishing for his good to be increased. For this very reason, when the motive that draws us toward anybody is simply some advantage for ourselves, the conditions of friendship are not fulfilled. Friendship is a supernatural harmony, a union of opposites.

When a human being is in any degree necessary to us, we cannot desire his good unless we cease to desire our own. Where there is necessity there is constraint and domination. We are in the power of that of which we stand in need, unless we possess it. The central good for every man is the free disposal of himself. Either we renounce it, which is a crime of idolatry, since it can be renounced only in favor of God, or we desire that the being we stand in need of should be deprived of this free disposal of himself.

Any kind of mechanism may join human beings together with bonds of affection which have the iron hardness of necessity. Mother love is often of such a kind; so at times is paternal love, as in *Père Goriot* of Balzac; so is carnal love in its most intense form, as in *L'Ecole des Femmes* and in *Phèdre*; so also, very frequently, is the love between husband and wife, chiefly as a result of habit. Filial and fraternal love are more rarely of this nature.

There are moreover degrees of necessity. Everything is necessary in some degree if its loss really causes a decrease of vital energy. (This word is here used in the strict and precise sense that it might have if the study of vital phenomena were as far advanced as that of falling bodies.) When the degree of necessity is extreme, deprivation leads to death. This is the case when all the vital energy of one being is

bound up with another by some attachment. In the lesser degrees, deprivation leads to a more or less considerable lessening of energy. Thus a total deprivation of food causes death, whereas a partial deprivation only diminishes the life force. Nevertheless the necessary quantity of food is considered to be that required if a person is not to be weakened.

The most frequent cause of necessity in the bonds of affection is a combination of sympathy and habit. As in the case of avarice or drunkenness, that which was at first a search for some desired good is transformed into a need by the mere passage of time. The difference from avarice, drunkenness, and all the vices, however, is that in the bonds of affection the two motives—search for a desired good, and need—can very easily coexist. They can also be separated. When the attachment of one being to another is made up of need and nothing else it is a fearful thing. Few things in this world can reach such a degree of ugliness and horror. There is always something horrible whenever a human being seeks what is good and only finds necessity. The stories that tell of a beloved being who suddenly appears with a death's head best symbolize this. The human soul possesses a whole arsenal of lies with which to put up a defense against this ugliness and, in imagination, to manufacture sham advantages where there is only necessity. It is for this very reason that ugliness is an evil, because it conduces to lying.

Speaking quite generally, we might say that there is affliction whenever necessity, under no matter what form, is imposed so harshly that the hardness exceeds the capacity for lying of the person who receives the impact. That is why

the purest souls are the most exposed to affliction. For him who is capable of preventing the automatic reaction of defense, which tends to increase the soul's capacity for lying, affliction is not an evil, although it is always a wounding and in a sense a degradation.

When a human being is attached to another by a bond of affection which contains any degree of necessity, it is impossible that he should wish autonomy to be preserved both in himself and in the other. It is impossible by virtue of the mechanism of nature. It is, however, made possible by the miraculous intervention of the supernatural. This miracle is friendship.

"Friendship is an equality made of harmony," said the Pythagoreans. There is harmony because there is a supernatural union between two opposites, that is to say, necessity and liberty, the two opposites God combined when he created the world and men. There is equality because each wishes to preserve the faculty of free consent both in himself and in the other.

When anyone wishes to put himself under a human being or consents to be subordinated to him, there is no trace of friendship. Racine's Pylades is not the friend of Orestes. There is no friendship where there is inequality.

A certain reciprocity is essential in friendship. If all good will is entirely lacking on one of the two sides, the other should suppress his own affection, out of respect for the free consent which he should not desire to force. If on one of the two sides there is not any respect for the autonomy of the other, this other must cut the bond uniting them out of respect for himself. In the same way, he who consents

to be enslaved cannot gain friendship. But the necessity contained in the bond of affection can exist on one side only, and in this case there is only friendship on one side, if we keep to the strict and exact meaning of the word.

A friendship is tarnished as soon as necessity triumphs, if only for a moment, over the desire to preserve the faculty of free consent on both sides. In all human things, necessity is the principle of impurity. All friendship is impure if even a trace of the wish to please or the contrary desire to dominate is found in it. In a perfect friendship these two desires are completely absent. The two friends have fully consented to be two and not one, they respect the distance which the fact of being two distinct creatures places between them. Man has the right to desire direct union with God alone.

Friendship is a miracle by which a person consents to view from a certain distance, and without coming any nearer, the very being who is necessary to him as food. It requires the strength of soul that Eve did not have; and yet she had no need of the fruit. If she had been hungry at the moment when she looked at the fruit, and if in spite of that she had remained looking at it indefinitely without taking one step toward it, she would have performed a miracle analogous to that of perfect friendship.

Through this supernatural miracle of respect for human autonomy, friendship is very like the pure forms of compassion and gratitude called forth by affliction. In both cases the contraries which are the terms of the harmony are necessity and liberty, or in other words subordination and equality. These two pairs of opposites are equivalent.

From the fact that the desire to please and the desire to command are not found in pure friendship, it has in it, at the same time as affection, something not unlike a complete indifference. Although it is a bond between two people it is in a sense impersonal. It leaves impartiality intact. It in no way prevents us from imitating the perfection of our Father in heaven who freely distributes sunlight and rain in every place. On the contrary, friendship and this distribution are the mutual conditions one of the other, in most cases at any rate. For, as practically every human being is joined to others by bonds of affection that have in them some degree of necessity, he cannot go toward perfection except by transforming this affection into friendship. Friendship has something universal about it. It consists of loving a human being as we should like to be able to love each soul in particular of all those who go to make up the human race. As a geometrician looks at a particular figure in order to deduce the universal properties of the triangle, so he who knows how to love directs upon a particular human being a universal love. The consent to preserve an autonomy within ourselves and in others is essentially of a universal order. As soon as we wish for this autonomy to be respected in more than just one single being we desire it for everyone, for we cease to arrange the order of the world in a circle whose center is here below. We transport the center of the circle beyond the heavens.

Friendship does not have this power if the two beings who love each other, through an unlawful use of affection, think they form only one. But then there is not friendship in the true sense of the word. That is what might be called

an adulterous union, even though it comes about between husband and wife. There is not friendship where distance is not kept and respected.

The simple fact of having pleasure in thinking in the same way as the beloved being, or in any case the fact of desiring such an agreement of opinion, attacks the purity of the friendship at the same time as its intellectual integrity. It is very frequent. But at the same time pure friendship is rare.

When the bonds of affection and necessity between human beings are not supernaturally transformed into friendship, not only is the affection of an impure and low order, but it is also combined with hatred and repulsion. That is shown very well in *L'Ecole des Femmes* and in *Phèdre*. The mechanism is the same in affections other than carnal love. It is easy to understand this. We hate what we are dependent upon. We become disgusted with what depends on us. Sometimes affection does not only become mixed with hatred and revulsion; it is entirely changed into it. The transformation may sometimes even be almost immediate, so that hardly any affection has had time to show; this is the case when necessity is laid bare almost at once. When the necessity which brings people together has nothing to do with the emotions, when it is simply due to circumstances, hostility often makes its appearance from the start.

When Christ said to his disciples: "Love one another," it was not attachment he was laying down as their rule. As it was a fact that there were bonds between them due to the thoughts, the life, and the habits they shared, he commanded them to transform these bonds into friendship, so

that they should not be allowed to turn into impure attachment or hatred.

Since, shortly before his death, Christ gave this as a new commandment to be added to the two great commandments of the love of our neighbor and the love of God, we can think that pure friendship, like the love of our neighbor, has in it something of a sacrament. Christ perhaps wished to suggest this with reference to Christian friendship when he said: "Where there are two or three gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them." Pure friendship is an image of the original and perfect friendship that belongs to the Trinity and is the very essence of God. It is impossible for two human beings to be one while scrupulously respecting the distance that separates them, unless God is present in each of them. The point at which parallels meet is infinity.

IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT LOVE

Even the most narrow-minded of Catholics would not dare to affirm that compassion, gratitude, love of the beauty of the world, love of religious practices, and friendship belonged exclusively to those centuries and countries that recognized the Church. These forms of love are rarely found in their purity, but it would even be difficult to say that they were met with more frequently in those centuries and countries than in the others. To think that love in any of these forms can exist anywhere where Christ is absent is to belittle him so grievously that it amounts to an outrage. It is impious and almost sacrilegious.

These kinds of love are supernatural, and in a sense they are absurd. They are the height of folly. So long as the soul has not had direct contact with the very person of God, they cannot be supported by any knowledge based either on experience or reason. They cannot therefore rest upon any certainty, unless the word is used in a metaphorical sense to indicate the opposite of hesitation. In consequence it is better that they should not be associated with any belief. This is more honest intellectually, and it safeguards our love's purity more effectively. On this account it is more fitting. In what concerns divine things, belief is not fitting. Only certainty will do. Anything less than certainty is unworthy of God.

During the period of preparation, these indirect loves constitute an upward movement of the soul, a turning of the eyes, not without some effort, toward higher things. After God has come in person, not only to visit the soul as he does for a long time beforehand, but to possess it and to transport its center near to his very heart, it is otherwise. The chicken has cracked its shell; it is outside the egg of the world. These first loves continue; they are more intense than before, but they are different. He who has passed through this adventure has a deeper love than ever for those who suffer affliction and for those who help him in his own, for his friends, for religious practices, and for the beauty of the world. But his love in all these forms has become a movement of God himself, a ray merged in the light of God. That at least is what we may suppose.

These indirect loves are only the attitude toward beings and things here below of the soul turned toward the Good.

They themselves have not any particular good as an object. There is no final good here below. Thus strictly speaking we are no longer concerned with forms of love, but with attitudes inspired by love.

In the period of preparation the soul loves in emptiness. It does not know whether anything real answers its love. It may believe that it knows, but to believe is not to know. Such a belief does not help. The soul knows for certain only that it is hungry. The important thing is that it announces its hunger by crying. A child does not stop crying if we suggest to it that perhaps there is no bread. It goes on crying just the same.

The danger is not lest the soul should doubt whether there is any bread, but lest, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry. It can only persuade itself of this by lying, for the reality of its hunger is not a belief, it is a certainty.

We all know that there is no true good here below, that everything that appears to be good in this world is finite, limited, wears out, and once worn out, leaves necessity exposed in all its nakedness. Every human being has probably had some lucid moments in his life when he has definitely acknowledged to himself that there is no final good here below. But as soon as we have seen this truth we cover it up with lies. Many people even take pleasure in proclaiming it, seeking a morbid joy in their sadness, without ever having been able to bear facing it for a second. Men feel that there is a mortal danger in facing this truth squarely for any length of time. That is true. Such knowledge strikes more surely than a sword; it inflicts a death more fright-

ening than that of the body. After a time it kills everything within us that constitutes our ego. In order to bear it we have to love truth more than life itself. Those who do this turn away from the fleeting things of time with all their souls, to use the expression of Plato.

They do not turn toward God. How could they do so when they are in total darkness? God himself sets their faces in the right direction. He does not, however, show himself to them for a long time. It is for them to remain motionless, without averting their eyes, listening ceaselessly, and waiting, they know not for what; deaf to entreaties and threats, unmoved by every shock, unshaken in the midst of every upheaval. If after a long period of waiting God allows them to have an indistinct intuition of his light or even reveals himself in person, it is only for an instant. Once more they have to remain still, attentive, inactive, calling out only when their desire cannot be contained.

It does not rest with the soul to believe in the reality of God if God does not reveal this reality. In trying to do so it either labels something else with the name of God, and that is idolatry, or else its belief in God remains abstract and verbal. Such a belief prevails wherever religious dogma is taken for granted, as is the case with those centuries and countries in which it never enters anyone's head to question it. The state of nonbelief is then what Saint John of the Cross calls a night. The belief is verbal and does not penetrate the soul. At a time like the present, incredulity may be equivalent to the dark night of Saint John of the Cross if the unbeliever loves God, if he is like the child who does

not know whether there is bread anywhere, but who cries out because he is hungry.

When we are eating bread, and even when we have eaten it, we know that it is real. We can nevertheless raise doubts about the reality of the bread. Philosophers raise doubts about the reality of the world of the senses. Such doubts are however purely verbal; they leave the certainty intact and actually serve only to make it more obvious to a well-balanced mind. In the same way he to whom God has revealed his reality can raise doubts about this reality without any harm. They are purely verbal doubts, a form of exercise to keep his intelligence in good health. What amounts to criminal treason, even before such a revelation and much more afterward, is to question the fact that God is the only thing worthy of love. That is a turning away of our eyes, for love is the soul's looking. It means that we have stopped for an instant to wait and to listen.

Electra did not seek Orestes, she waited for him. When she was convinced that he no longer existed, and that nowhere in the whole world was there anything that could be Orestes, she did not on that account return to her former associates. She drew back from them with greater aversion than ever. She preferred the absence of Orestes to the presence of anyone else. Orestes was to have delivered her from slavery, from rags, servile work, dirt, hunger, blows, and innumerable humiliations. She no longer hoped for that. But never for an instant did she dream of employing another method which could obtain a luxurious and honored life for her—the method of reconciliation with those in power. She did not want wealth and consideration unless

they came through Orestes. She did not even give a thought to such things. All she wanted was to exist no longer, since Orestes had ceased to exist.

At that moment Orestes could hold out no longer. He could not help declaring himself. He gave certain proof that he was Orestes. Electra saw him, she heard him, she touched him. There would be no more question for her now as to whether her savior was in existence.

He who has had the same adventure as Electra, he whose soul has seen, heard, and touched for itself, he will recognize God as the reality inspiring all indirect loves, the reality of which they are as it were the reflections. God is pure beauty. This is incomprehensible, for beauty, by its very essence, has to do with the senses. To speak of an imperceptible beauty must seem a misuse of language to anyone who has any sense of exactitude: and with reason. Beauty is always a miracle. But the miracle is raised to the second degree when the soul receives an impression of beauty which, while it is beyond all sense perception is no abstraction, but real and direct as the impression caused by a song at the moment it reaches our ears. Everything happens as though, by a miraculous favor, our very senses themselves had been made aware that silence is not the absence of sounds, but something infinitely more real than sounds, and the center of a harmony more perfect than anything which a combination of sounds can produce. Furthermore there are degrees of silence. There is a silence in the beauty of the universe which is like a noise when compared with the silence of God.

God is, moreover, our real neighbor. The term of person

can only be rightly applied to God, and this is also true of the term impersonal. God is he who bends over us, afflicted as we are, and reduced to the state of being nothing but a fragment of inert and bleeding flesh. Yet at the same time he is in some sort the victim of misfortune as well, the victim who appears to us as an inanimate body, incapable of thought, this nameless victim of whom nothing is known. The inanimate body is this created universe. The love we owe to God, this love that would be our crowning perfection if we were able to attain to it, is the divine model both of gratitude and compassion.

God is also the perfect friend. So that there should be between him and us, bridging the infinite distance, something in the way of equality, he has chosen to place an absolute quality in his creatures, the absolute liberty of consent, which leaves us free to follow or swerve from the God-ward direction he has communicated to our souls. He has also extended our possibilities of error and falsehood so as to leave us the faculty of exercising a spurious rule in imagination, not only over the universe and the human race, but also over God himself, in so far as we do not know how to use his name aright. He has given us this faculty of infinite illusion so that we should have the power to renounce it out of love.

In fact, contact with God is the true sacrament.

We can, however, be almost certain that those whose love of God has caused the disappearance of the pure loves belonging to our life here below are no true friends of God.

Our neighbor, our friends, religious ceremonies, and the beauty of the world do not fall to the level of unrealities

after the soul has had direct contact with God. On the contrary, it is only then that these things become real. Previously they were half dreams. Previously they had no reality.

Simone Weil

WAITING FOR GOD

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